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Chapter 8: Pioneering Position Of The Shi'ah In The Field Of Biographies (Siyar)

The pioneer in this field is Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi', a retainer of the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and his Household. He wrote about *siyar* during the time of the Commander of the Faithful, Ali ibn Abi Talib ('a) to whom he was secretary. His book drew the attention of the people. Sheikh Abu Ja'far al–Tusi declares in his *Fihrist*: "Ubaydullah ibn Abi Rafi', the secretary of the Commander of the Faithful ('a) wrote *Kitab Qadaya Amir al–Muminin* and *Kitab Tasmiyat man Shahida ma'a Amir al–Muminin al–Jamal wa Siffin wa al–Nahrawan min al–Sahabah* (Enumerating the Companions Who were With the Commander of the Faithful ('a) in the Battles of Jamal, Siffin and Nahrwan). His work is, in any case, preferred to the work ascribed to Urwa ibn al–Zubayr."

According to authentic sources the first to write a biography of the Prophet, may Allah bless him and his Household, was, according to the correct version, Muhammad ibn Ishaq al–Matlabi, the Medinan retainer of this Household. The author of *Kashf al–Zunun* says: "The first person to write about biographies was the leading figure known as Muhammad ibn Ishaq, the master of those who wrote on military expeditions (*ahl al–maghazi*). He died in 151 A. H.". He recorded in the section under the letter 'mim', "The discipline dealing with military expeditions and biographies: The military expeditions of the Messenger of Allah were first compiled by Muhammad ibn Ishaq." It is also said that the first person to write about it was Urwa ibn al–Zubayr.

This claim is not recognized by those who are conversant with history. It was al–Suyuti who awarded this merit to Ibn al–Zubayr instead of Ibn Ishaq although this is quite strange. Al–Suyuti did this because Ibn Ishaq was a Shi'ah. Ibn Hajar has attested to his Shi'ism and so have our companions in the books of *rijal*.

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